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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

FRIDAY, March 17, 1933.

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Subject: "Cooking Vegetables." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, United States Department of Agriculture.

Time was when many good people believed that eating should be a duty rather than a pleasure. "Eat to nourish the body, not to please the appetite," was a stern old Puritan motto. Any many a severe parent insisted that the children eat what was set before them, whether it tasted pleasant or not.

"Eat your greens and carrots, son. I know they have a disagreeable flavor but they are useful to your system."

Imagine how the young son enjoyed his meal when it was offered to him along with that advice! I, for one, am glad the food experts today have a kinder and broader point of view about eating. I'm glad they advise eating for both profit and pleasure, for both food value and flavor. I'm glad they're interested in cooking food so that it tastes delicious and looks tempting, yet keeps all its valuable properties. Most people, children included, will eat good food if it tempts the appetite. They won't feel that eating is a sad duty if the food is too good to resist. Even carrots and greens can be favorites with the whole family, if they are properly prepared and served. Prejudice developed against vegetables is often the result of poor cooking which spoils both their flavor and their appearance.

The Bureau of Home Economics at Washington, D. C. has been running cooking tests on vegetables for some years. Some of these tests are cooperative with the Bureau of Plant Industry. When the crop specialists develop a new variety of vegetable or bring in a new kind from some other country, the cooking specialists try out its cooking qualities. They also take the common garden kinds and cook them in ways that conserve food values and give what's sometimes called "appetite appeal."

The discoveries in nutrition of the last twenty years or so have given the scientists, as well as the rest of us, a new idea of the value of vegetables in the diet. The scientists have discovered that the green, the yellow and the orange color in vegetables means more than just a pretty appearance. These colors usually indicate the presence of certain vitamins. The scientists have also learned that the heat tends to destroy some of the vitamins, and that when vegetables are cut up and cooked in water, some of the minerals are bound to dissolve out into the water. Chemical changes also take place in vegetables as they cook--changes that affect flavor, color and texture. Some of these changes make vegetables more appetizing. Some do not.

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So the modern science of cooking vegetables is something like this. It combines these facts about the nutritive value of vegetables and about the chemistry of cooking so skillfully that when the vegetables come on the table, they look good and they taste good. Nobody has to urge us to eat them.

Now about cooking methods. Baking is the method that stands first as a means of conserving food value. For example, take potatoes baked in their skins. Baked potatoes lose no minerals and very little of their vitamin content and the moisture in the potatoes themselves changes to steam and cooks them soft and mealy. That is why food specialists put baked potatoes on children's menus so often.

Fortunately, our modern baking dishes of earthenware and tempered glass make it possible to bake vegetables that we never used to cook by this method. Baked tomatoes, baked onions, baked beets, baked stuffed cucumbers, and mixed vegetables in a casserole are all delicious. The specialists advise using a moderate oven in baking vegetables so that the heat will penetrate evenly.

For the vegetables that don't bake successfully, steaming is one method of cooking, boiling another, and pan-frying another. Steaming conserves food value, but it spoils the attractive color of green vegetables. Steaming is a satisfactory method of cooking carrots, squash, sweetpotatoes, parsnips and wax beans.

Of course, boiling is the method most frequently used for cooking vegetables. And, alas, this method carelessly used, has done a lot of damage to good vegetables. As a nation there's no telling how much food value we boil out of our vegetables and waste each year by throwing away this water in which vegetables are cooked. And we lose in another way, too--we lose flavor and attractive texture and good looks of the vegetable. Over-cooked vegetables are generally mushy or flabby. We aren't stimulated to eat as many as we need for the sake of our health.

Here are the directions for boiling given by the specialists: first, use a small quantity of water; second, have it boiling when you put the vegetable in; third, cook only long enough to make the vegetable tender. By tender, I don't mean soft. Green vegetables lose their greenness very easily. So for spinach, brussels sprouts, green cabbage, green snap beans and peas, leave the lid off the kettle. This will allow the volatile acids to escape and preserve the green color.

What about using a pinch of soda in the cooking water to keep green vegetables green? If you use soda you destroy valuable vitamins, one of the principal reasons for eating the vegetables. The food specialists in their experiments are working for methods that conserve vitamins, minerals and other food values and also enough of the attractive color to please the eye. When it comes to a choice, they would rather sacrifice a little green color than a good deal of food value.

We have just time to plan our Sunday dinner--a simple but satisfying dinner featuring some old favorites in the food line. Stewed chicken with dumplings; Pickled peaches or spiced crabapples; Green beans, buttered; Fried sweetpotatoes; and, for dessert, Tart fruit cup.

Monday, we'll discuss inexpensive cuts of meat and ways to use them.

